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2. Political Conditions, Opinions and Attitudes

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THIS IS UNEVALUATED INFORMATION

SOURCE

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Agricultural Situation in Czechoslovakia:

1. The 1953 wheat harvest was as good as the 1952 harvest, but the yields of fruit, potatoes, and sugar beets in 1953 were very low. Source had no information on amounts or percentages. He heard from a Czech railway worker that after the June 17 riots in East Germany, large amounts of grain were sent there from Czechoslovakia. He did not know how the Czechs were compensated for this.

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Reception of Foreign Broadcasts

2. Source preferred news and discussion programs. The RFE commentaries on life inside Czechoslovakia were very good. He also thought that the programs of VOA were admirable. They were serious, well balanced, and concrete. As he put it, they presented the true voice of America, and so could not be improved upon. Despite the zealous efforts of the reporting officer, Source could not be persuaded to suggest even the slightest changes in VOA's transmissions to Czechoslovakia.

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3. Listening to foreign broadcasts was very widespread. At Source's office, for example, there was one employee who made himself responsible for picking up news broadcasts in the evening and passing on to a small circle of trusted friends the main points in the news of the previous day. This was a very common and very satisfactory arrangement, as it saved everyone a great deal of time. It also permitted the job of listening for news to be given to a person who knew English, French, or German, and who thus could pick up broadcasts not affected by jamming. German-language news broadcasts did not give enough attention to Czechoslovak affairs, but the Czechs thought that the general level of the foreign political news reporting on the West German radio stations was quite high.

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Attitudes toward Anti-Communist Emigre Activities

4. Source said that while there were many people who took no interest in the activities of the emigres, nearly everyone who was at all interested in politics had some opinions on the subject. The views of these people were that the splits among the emigres were regrettable in the extreme, and that the emigres should realize that the Czechoslovak people are tired almost to death of political parties, recrimination, and agitation. Dr. ZENKL is well thought of, but he does not fill the generally felt need for some one outstanding figure abroad who could do for the present generation what Dr. BENES or Jan MASARYK did, or could have done, in other periods. The emigres of this generation have to some extent lost contact with the population. If, through some miracle, the Communist government were to disappear tomorrow, people would prefer to have the country physically occupied by Western troops for six months or so to give the nation a rest from politics, rather than to have all of the old parties spring up again. People spoke in terms of having not more than two or perhaps three political parties. A joint declaration, in as concrete form as possible, by the anti-Communist exile groups of their post-liberation political program would be welcomed, as evidence that there is some direction and leadership in the movement abroad. Such a declaration should try to take a position upon such questions as whether and how much nationalized property there would be after Communism was overthrown, what the international relations of a post-liberation Czechoslovakia would be, and so on.
5. Source said that the Czechoslovak people greatly feared that America and Britain would eventually come to think that they accepted and were in some measure resigned to the Communist system. It was very important that public figures in the West avoid any suggestion that the Communists have succeeded in converting to Communism more than a tiny minority of the Czechoslovak people. Repeated public demonstrations of this recognition by Western statesmen of how few convinced Communists there really are in the Satellite countries improve people's morale and help them to bear up under their burden. For this reason, people welcomed the balloon action, as a sign that the West was still interested in them. At the same time, Source thought that it would have been worthwhile to send along with the balloons little printed statements or resumes of the West's policy toward Communism.

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Czech-Slovak Relations

6. Source said that the political outlook in Slovakia is unclear. For some time after the 1948 coup there were very many Slovaks who blamed the Czechs for allowing the Communist seizure of power. Though many still felt the same way, Source thought that the pressure of Communist oppression was driving the Czechs and Slovaks closer together, and causing the Slovaks to reconsider old cliches about Communism having come from Prague. Passive resistance to Communism was probably stronger in Slovakia than in Bohemia and Moravia. As was indicated above in discussing the agricultural situation, the Party is having great difficulty finding pro-Communist Slovaks to fill many responsible positions. Even Slovaks who were Party members would frequently with impunity ignore Party directives, so strong and so widespread was the passive resistance by Party and non-Party Slovaks alike.
7. As regards the future, most educated Czechs and Slovaks thought that about the only security for the Czech and Slovak peoples lay in very close association with the free countries of Western Europe and with a liberated Poland, Hungary, and so on. Since it is taken for granted that some form of Western European political community is slowly being put together, the Czechs and Slovaks think it would be best that they and their neighbors join such a community. Whether they join as Czechs and Slovaks separately, or as Czechoslovaks, or as members of a regional sub-federation including Poles, Austrians, and perhaps others, is a question on which there are no hard and fast opinions. Nobody at all wanted to see an independent middle-European federation established, as this was spoken of as nothing but another Austro-Hungarian empire.

Information about Leading Communists

8. Source was a Party member, but held no Party offices and had no inside information on Party activities or on the personal histories of important Party members. He thought that UHER and NOVOTNY were two of the coming men in the Party and government. The former was much feared at the Ministry of Agriculture, as a ruthless, ambitious man. UHER's present job involves direction and coordination of the activities of several Ministries, including that of Agriculture, but Source said that UHER only spent about two hours daily at the Ministry of Agriculture, and was generally believed still to have some Party responsibilities. Source said that FIERLINGER "had done his work already" and had no future. He thought that DOLANSKY had lost influence recently. He interpreted BACILEK's change of job as a demotion and said people speculated that this may have been because of a connection with BERIA. He heard that NECASEK, who had held a responsible job under GOTTWALD, had since been removed from his position.
9. In his opinion, ZAPOTOCKY's failure to assume the title of Party chairman meant that collective leadership would be stressed. CEPICKA was still a very important man, and had not apparently lost rank after GOTTWALD's death.
10. Party morale was very poor in the lower ranks. People were tired of the strain of working long hours for low pay, of attending frequent political meetings, and of rarely being able to do something on their own. In the Ministry of Agriculture, for example, the political meetings became such a nuisance that in some offices Party members would connive at the omission of a scheduled meeting now and then. In his own office, on several occasions the Party leader would ask the 25 or so members in the office to sign a paper showing that they had attended a fictitious scheduled meeting pre-dated the evening before. In the last two

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years, there had been no large-scale purge of Party ranks in the Ministry, where Party members make up from 80 to 90% of the employees. Young activists from the youth organization C. S. M. are recruited into the Party now and then, but in general Source had the impression that young people were not trying to join the Party in any considerable number, and that the Party leadership was probably content to allow the Party to shrink in size slowly. Probably only 10 or 12 per cent of the Party members were fanatics. The rest were opportunists or secret anti-Communists.

11. When STALIN and GOTTWALD died, there was stagnation in Party and government affairs, as everyone waited to see what would happen next. People thought that the present government in Moscow was not much different from that of STALIN's, but that maybe the military now had more influence. This meant that there was less chance of war, as the military presumably saw the power line-up in the world with clearer eyes than the Party fanatics.
12. Source heard from a friend, who heard from a member of the S. N. B. who was at the SLANSKY execution, that it took over two hours to hang SLANSKY and his confederates. They are said to have struggled with the jailors and hangmen, shouting that they didn't want to die, and that they had been promised that they wouldn't be executed. The execution was carried out in Pankrac prison, Prague, before about 60 persons, including high government officials, guards, and one witness from the Party organization in each of the 19 districts in the republic. It was widely believed that the announcement of the sentence of SVERMOVA was delayed because she was kept in the Soviet Union for questioning for many months. Many Czechs believed for a time that BERIA had probably escaped to the West, and some thought that he still might be alive in the West despite (or because of) the announcement of his trial and execution in secret.
13. There was a special store for high Party functionaries in Spalana Ulice, Prague, where high Party members could buy goods of better quality than were generally available. Source never visited this store, but he heard from friends that prices were the same as in other stores. The Minister of Agriculture, NEPOMUCKY, was paid 23,000 old-style crowns before the currency reform. At the official conversion rate of five to one, he should have received 4,750 new-style crowns monthly after June 1, 1953. In fact, his post-currency reform pay was 6,500 crowns monthly, which meant that the change of currency brought with it a 40% raise in pay for the Minister, if not for the ordinary citizen.

Opinion on New Economic Course

14. Source did not have any information on industrial developments, but it was his impression, from talks with a wide variety of friends in the government in Prague, that the "New Course" is mostly a propaganda gesture. He heard from a friend that in August 1953 there were some days or weeks during which work had to be suspended at the Letov airplane factory on the edge of Prague (sic) because of a lack of raw materials, but there has been no cutback of military production.

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